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Kurdish “patriotic” families: An incentive or an impediment to joining the PKK through the generations and according to gender

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Participation in national liberation struggles is often considered to be a “family tradition”. The academic literature has taken up the idea that every Kurdish family should “give a child” to the guerrilla movement. These assertions have rarely been based on qualitative data. To examine the role of family traditions on the militant trajectories of the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (PKK), we met 64 of its guerrilla fighters from three consecutive generations, encompassing a broad militancy period from the mid-1980s until today. This paper highlights the variable impact of primary socialisation processes, in particular the patriotic family, according to the generations and gender, suggesting that retrospective narratives made by PKK militants themselves reflect reluctance among their family members towards their engagement in the clandestine struggle.

Keywords: PKK, Kurdish conflict, armed struggle, political commitment, generations

Résumé : Il est commun de considérer, s’agissant des luttes de libération nationale se déployant sur des décennies, qu’y prendre part est souvent une « affaire de famille » (Crettiez, 2011).

Concernant le conflit turco-kurde, la littérature académique s’est faite le relais de l’idée selon laquelle chaque famille kurde devait « donner » un enfant à la guérilla. Néanmoins ces

affirmations se sont rarement fondées sur des enquêtes de sociologie qualitative. Afin de mettre en évidence le rôle des traditions politiques et patriotes familiales sur les trajectoires d'engagement des militant.e.s du *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (PKK), nous avons rencontré 64 de leurs membres. L'article met en évidence l'incidence variable de ces héritages et de la socialisation primaire, en particulier la dimension patriotique familiale, selon les générations d'engagement au sein du parti et selon le sexe des militants. Il suggère qu'y compris dans les familles patriotes, les récits rétrospectifs font davantage état des réticences familiales face à l'engagement clandestin qu'elles n'y sont une incitation active.

Mots-clefs : PKK, socialisation primaire, Kurdes patriotes, lutte armée, engagement politique.

Introduction

From 2014, and following the Kurdish resistance in Kobane against the Islamic State, the mainstream media has increasingly portrayed Kurdish women on the front lines, drawing international attention to the single-sex battalions under the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) (Buffon and Allison 2016). The documentary "*Her War: Women Vs ISIS*"³ is an emblematic example of the way Kurdish women combatants have been brought to the forefront in a context that has been labelled a "war on terror", where the Western camp has established a very clear frontier between good and evil. Each non-mixed battalion, which numbered ten in 2016, consisted of 300 female combatants. Women represent 40% of the People's Protection Unit (YPG) troops, whose number was between 50,000 and 60,000 by the end of 2016,⁴ at which point female combatants represented a contingent of around 24,000 individuals. This dual structure (non-mixed units and a large contingent of women within the mixed units) is also found in the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (PKK – Kurdistan Workers' Party) under the *Yekitiyên Jinên Azad/YJA-Star* (Free Women's Units) and the *Hêzên Parastina Gel* (HPG –

People's Defence Forces) in which a third of the members are women.

Beyond the media interest it attracted, the presence of Kurdish women in a guerrilla warfare scenario constitutes a primary sociological subject that needs to be studied. To grasp the specificity of female participation in guerrilla lines, we need to compare their backgrounds with those of their male counterparts. Do certain factors (primary and secondary socialisation, the weight of patriarchal society) weigh more heavily on women's than men's trajectories regarding involvement in guerrilla warfare? Do any specific factors affect the involvement of women in Kurdish armed organisations? Do men and women join the PKK for the same reasons and follow similar or distinct sociological processes?

The factors that lead to political violence contain psychological, social, economic, political (national and geopolitical), religious and ideological aspects. To address these factors, we adopted an approach in which political violence is found in the radicalisation of conflicts, and involves the interaction of various institutional and non-institutional actors. It is also an emergent approach insofar as it aims at "*reconstructing the causal mechanisms that link the macrosystem in which clandestine political violence develops, the mesosystem formed by radical organisations, and the microsystem of the symbolic interactions within militant networks*" (Della Porta 2013, 5).

In the analysis of clandestine recruitment mechanisms, there has been little emphasis on the place of families in the recruits' trajectory, or on differentiated roles in the trajectories of women and men. Primary socialisation, however, forms part of the cognitive mechanisms facilitating clandestine engagement, in the same way as the ideological and cultural representations of the conflict, conveyed both within the family and as a result of the actors' experiences. In most cases, family and relational socialisation play a key role, whether through belonging to a lineage of combatants, by

simply encouraging a family member to join the armed struggle, or through imposed respect for a violent clan culture (Crettiez and Sèze 2017). Concerning the departure of jihadists, a “family economy of consent” has been highlighted, favouring armed engagement when it is not penalised financially or might even lead to financial rewards (Asal, Fair, and Shelmann 2008). In this context, children may be exposed to a culturally nurtured family expectation that encourages violent engagement, together with active family encouragement to engage. In cases such as Northern Ireland, the Basque Country or Corsica, there is a “family tradition” (Alcedo 1996, 51; Reinares 2001: 60-61) where children feel a vested interest in defending the memory of parents who died in combat or were imprisoned.⁵

In the area of clandestine combat, not only is interest in family factors and primary socialisation limited, but the variability of their impact on male and female trajectories of entry into political violence has also rarely been explored. The specificity of these trajectories has been tackled in a comparative study on the incentives of Salvadoran women with regard to guerrilla warfare and those remaining below the level of activism (Viterna 2006). However, the said study did not include intergenerational comparisons of the pathways to armed struggle.

Eliciting a detailed answer to whether certain sociological factors weigh more heavily on women than men in their trajectories of engagement in the guerrilla movement, or whether there are specific factors in women’s engagement in the PKK, implies accepting an excessive level of generality and conducting a rigorous examination of the trajectories of both in diverse geographical areas. It would be inappropriate to compare trajectories followed by men and women without considering the context of their engagement and the social cohorts or generations to which they belong. For this reason, we opted to focus on the similarities and differences of these

trajectories within a restricted framework, including only those individuals who joined the PKK from Turkey.

In order to highlight the role of patriotic family traditions on the trajectories of engagement of PKK activists, we first specify the modalities of the survey we conducted and, second, how this survey informs the work carried out in the field. We then proceed with a twofold analysis of the differential weight of these family traditions across three generations, and the variability of their impact on male and female trajectories. Finally, we look at the common assumption that each family in *Bakur* (Northern Kurdistan, south-eastern Turkey) has given a child to the PKK, with a focus on the strategies families adopt to keep their children away from political-military involvement.

This paper thus highlights the usefulness of a micro-sociological analysis in grasping the intricacies of clandestine pathways within the PKK. It highlights the complex interactions of the factors informing these trajectories at the macro, meso, and micro-sociological levels. Finally, it complements the collection of primary data on the militants involved in Turkey's long-running Kurdish insurgency.

1. Methodology and the prior literature

1.1. Unknown paths towards activism

Concerning the trajectories of militants engaged in the PKK, apart from studies on the Kurdish diaspora in Europe (Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Grojean 2003), empirical work on the topic remains relatively scarce due to the obvious difficulty of getting access to the guerrilla fighters. A remarkable field study by Dorronsoro and Grojean (2004) devoted to the Kurds of Turkey sought to capture involvement in radicalisation within the PKK and the Turkish Hizbullah from the perspective of social movement “entrepreneurs”,

and personal testimonies regarding the processes inherent in joining a radical group. We have attempted to extend their study by focusing on three generations of PKK involvement from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s (*Author reference*, 2022). This analysis enabled us to sketch out the paths of engagement and the different motives for involvement in the Kurdish armed struggle for each generation, together with the impact of interactions with representatives of the Turkish state (army, police, teachers, etc.) on individuals in each cohort. It also highlighted the impact of strategic and ideological changes in the PKK on militant trajectories.

In this earlier study, we used the notion of generation in the sense of “social generation” or “political generation” rather than in the demographic sense of age-group cohorts (Mannheim 1928). A generation in the sociological sense (i.e., a “social generation”) is when actors participate in the same events and experiences in their formative years, within the “same historical-cultural framework of life” (Cartier and Spire 2011). Indeed, only the same social-historical framework of life allows the situation defined by birth in chronological time to become a sociologically relevant situation (Mannheim 1928, 52). Thus, actors exposed to the same “social and political symptoms of a dynamic process of destabilisation” belong to the same “political generation” (Mannheim 1928, 52; Pagis 2018, 29; Andrews 2002). This is the definition of generation used in the present paper.

While studies on PKK engagement modalities are relatively rare, feminist studies on Kurdish women have expanded considerably in recent decades. Gradually emancipated from the victim perspective of women suffering from the conflict (Mojab 2000), these studies have often been framed within an intersectional perspective that invokes feminist and gender theories in analysing the relationship between minorities and nation (Begikhani, Wendelmoet, and Weiss 2018). They also include studies of the role of women in the Kurdish nationalist movement (Mojab 2001), applying a gender

critique to the understanding of nationalism among Kurds that allows women to be represented as active subjects and not just as victims of violence (Çağlayan 2012).

Among the work on women's political engagement, while some studies have focused on legal participation and the struggle to promote women's rights (Hardi 2013), others have concentrated on women's integration in underground organisations (Çağlayan 2020). The literature has extensively explored the clandestine engagement of Kurdish women in Iran (Shahidian 1997), Turkey and Syria (Grojean 2019), with scholars also exploring the structural operations of the PKK and Komala (Guillemet 2017), the differences between theoretical discourse and actual practice within guerrilla units (Grojean 2013), the revolutionary gender division of labour within the different units (Karimi 2020) or, more simply, gender-related ideological developments within the PKK (Çağlayan 2012). The studies also note the significant impact of women's armed engagement on the political and civil participation of other women (Guillemet 2017; Karimi 2020), highlighting the mutual interaction between the political ideology of the movement in question and women's political participation.

Within this rich panorama, our contribution adopts a micro-social perspective to offer a sociological study on clandestine commitment within the PKK by comparing the paths followed by female and male militants. We aim to identify the specific nature of women's involvement in the PKK by differentiating between female and male clandestine involvement mechanisms, notably, the weight of family traditions. The study relies on the theoretical framework of social movement and gender studies, with the focus on analysis at micro-social level.

Several mechanisms can lead to clandestine involvement. Conceptually, they can be envisaged in macro-social terms, either as historical paths that involve searching for observable and context-dependent events, or as micro-level explanations that

involve a search for variables at individual level, seeking universal, law-like causal explanations. On the one hand, mechanisms refer to intermediary steps between conditions and outcomes, and consist of causal reconstruction. On the other hand, in micro-level explanations, attention is instead drawn to individuals' actions and the links that are forged between the different actors (Hedström and Bearman 2009, 4). More broadly, we consider that clandestine engagement mechanisms serve as pathways to the pursuit of a specific purpose or the accomplishment of a goal (Gerring 2008, 178). In this sense, three types of mechanism can be highlighted, depending on the level of analysis envisaged: the rational choice process (micro-level), structural functionalism (macro-level), and the power of collective actors (meso-level) (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003, 1-2). Consequently, mechanisms can be understood as “a concatenation of generative events linking macro causes (such as contextual transformation) to aggregated effects (e.g., cycles of protest) through individual and/or organisational agents” (Della Porta 2013, 24).

1.2.Engagement processes of male and female guerrillas

The case of primary socialisation

The central hypothesis regarding the paths towards armed activism within the PKK suggests that women's militant trajectories often differ empirically from those of men (Grojean 2019, 149). Young women in rural Kurdistan opt to join the guerrilla movement in order to escape from the hardship of the life otherwise deemed suitable for them (e.g., arranged marriage, lack of education or opportunities for social advancement) by their authoritarian father, brother or mother, or because they find themselves in a situation of extreme uncertainty (e.g., destruction and evacuation of the village, imprisonment or murder of relatives). On the other hand, in the 1990s, Kurdish

men joined the guerrilla forces to escape military service, to avoid being recruited as *Korucu* (village guards, state-sponsored paramilitary militias), or due to the lack of career opportunities. When it comes to primary socialisation processes, Grojean argues that the militant engagement of young men is generally better accepted by the family than that of women, although engagement is indiscriminately facilitated among patriotic Kurdish families (Grojean 2019, 150). As one of the factors fostering engagement, does patriotic susceptibility manage to counterbalance the weight of the traditional patriarchal society in the process of women's engagement? Can we consider that the same sociological dynamics affect both sexes in similar ways?

While male and female trajectories can obviously be analysed using the same theoretical tools, certain forms of engagement vary significantly depending on gender and the period in question. Political commitment, including underground movements, depend heavily on biographical factors (youth, willingness to leave, absence of marital life or children), awareness of the cause, the existence of recruitment networks, individuals' skills and economic resources, the role of elders or emblematic figures who act as encouraging or inciting agents (uncle, cousins, brothers and sisters, and so on). These processes can be initiated within the framework of primary socialisation, which constitutes an incentive factor in certain political traditions (Della Porta 1995: 166-170). What is the situation like in the Kurdish world? Do these factors intercede in a similar way in the paths of men and women who join guerrilla organisations?

Generations and gender

Involvement in an armed struggle is often considered as a family affair (Crettiez 2016, 720). The weight of primary socialisation is essential in perennial conflicts, sometimes involving several generations who construct a memory of the struggle at the origin of

family narratives. *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) membership in the 1990s was often linked to a specific family background, where it was common to find daughters and sons of imprisoned or killed activists in the ranks of the underground group (Reinares 2001; Guibet Lafaye 2020). In-family nationalist education in the Basque country created an environment in which primary socialisation raised individuals' awareness of values, helping to develop a specific identity by lulling them with narratives that often consist of repressive memories. Distressing experiences foster feelings of humiliation or a desire for revenge when a loved one has been killed or publicly humiliated. Several studies have focused on the geographical origin and secondary socialisation of PKK militants (Dorronsoro and Grojean 2004), but little attention has been paid to the impact of primary socialisation, and even less to the trajectories of male and female militants.⁶

Does political commitment and the family's "patriotic fibre" have a greater impact on male than female trajectories in the PKK? Is men's involvement in the PKK more easily accepted than that of women's in patriotic Kurdish families? Is there a primary socialisation of politics that affects men more directly than women? What role does the involvement of relatives play on descendants? Does seeing family members join guerrilla groups mark women's trajectories more than men's? Do we observe young women, inspired by these family models, forging, both inwardly and outwardly, the decision to move closer to the PKK? Does a family's political or patriotic sensitivity constitute an incentive for clandestine engagement or, conversely, an obstacle that prevents potential candidates from further involvement? The field data we collected sheds some light on these questions. In addition to the effect of gender disparities, we show how these differences are articulated in diverse ways across generations.

1.3. Methodology: data collection and data analysis strategy

Our analysis is based on a survey conducted between March 2016 and March 2017 in northern Iraq,⁷ which led us to meet both female (29) and male (36) guerrillas. Due to the specific nature of the context, where contact opportunities are difficult to obtain, respondents were either contacted directly (especially those who had left the PKK) or through a “snowball sampling strategy”⁸ (Laperrière 1997). Contact was made both by acquaintance and by communicating with the person in charge of the group's international and external relations. All of the the interviewees were born between 1966 and 1994, and all of the activists interviewed were from Turkey. This methodological choice was made to homogenise the group of interviewees and, for reasons of relevance, to incorporate Turkey’s macro-social and historical context. Similarly, all but 10 of the individuals interviewed were active members of the PKK. They were interviewed in their home or in their workplace. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed and translated. They lasted between 42 minutes and over 3 hours, for an average of 77 minutes per interview. They were all conducted face-to-face, in either Turkish or Kurdish Kurmanji. Table 1 presents the list of respondents and their sociodemographic characteristics. [***Table 1 near here***] The primary data collection was complemented by a systematic study of written documents published by the PKK, particularly the two monthly journals, *Serxwebûn* and *Berxwedan*.⁹

The interviews were organised in two stages. First, and from the perspective of collecting oral histories (Passerini, 1987; Thompson, 1988), people were asked to narrate their “political career”. They were then asked questions. These questions were divided into several parts, dealing respectively with the motivations for political involvement, the process of radicalisation and repression, the construction of meaning and normative production, and finally current events. Each interview followed the same

order of questions. The interviewees were informed beforehand that they were not obliged to answer the questions. At the end of the interview, they were asked if they wished to add anything related to the interview (Smith 1995). For active PKK members, the organisational structure facilitated meetings, although individuals were free to refuse the interview. Those who had left the party were motivated in particular by the desire to explain their departure, which is always difficult to accept within the Kurdish community.

Our data analysis strategy consisted of a systematic analysis of the responses to the following questions: “What has been your political experience until today? When did you join the Kurdish movement/the guerrilla movement/the PKK? How did the engagement happen? i.e. via a specific person? In which context? What triggered your engagement? Did anything make you hesitant? Was there a patriotic feeling in your family? Did other members of your family join the guerrilla groups? What did this engagement mean to you? What was your goal when you engaged in this action? Why did you agree/choose to fight and to take up arms?”.¹⁰ In order to grasp the trajectories of engagement, the factors that motivated them and their cognitive interpretation framework, we conducted a systematic analysis of the responses. To process this material in a methodical way, we produced a summary sheet for each interview containing a synopsis of the information gathered in the interview, based on the method of Huberman and Miles (1994). All summaries were subjected to an individual analysis based on thematic coding, which made it possible to identify similarities in the responses. Coding of the interviews was inspired by Roland Barthes’ (1981) three levels of discourse: the episodes of the narrative (the chronology), the elements of the narrative that feature “actors” (characters who act, intervene, play a role in the

narrative) and the level of narration, i.e., the presence of theories, proposals intended to convince.

A rigorous analysis of the singularities of women's involvement in the PKK was underpinned by an earlier analysis of cohorts or "social generations" of guerrilla groups. The history of the party and the respondents' accounts contributed to the emergence of three cohorts of involvement (*Author reference, 2022*), corresponding to stages in the socio-historical evolution of Turkey's macro-social context and the meso-social transformations of the PKK. The first coincides with the period of the party's emergence (between 1978 and the late 1980s). The second corresponds to a period of intense conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK during the 1990s. The third began following the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, the main ideologist and leader of the PKK, on 15 February 1999. Each of these stages is concomitant with changes in the conditions for joining the PKK and Turkey's macro-social situation.

This methodological requirement turned out to be challenging for the most senior generation of respondents, however, namely C1 (Cohort 1), in which women are underrepresented. We were only able to meet one woman (Samira) among the nine individuals interviewed during our field research. Following our questions, the PKK sources confirmed that most of the early period female leaders had been killed in armed confrontations. The diaries of Samira Cansız (alias *Sara*), who participated in the founding meeting of the PKK in 1978 and was assassinated in Paris in 2013, are the only existing primary source. The most significant empirical evidence in the comparison between male and female trajectories comes from the second and third cohorts (hereinafter C2 and C3). Our survey produced better parity in these generations as we were able to meet 17 women and 24 men in C2, and 9 women and 5 men in C3.¹¹

In addition to the historical contextualisation and parity dimension, attention must also be paid to the geographical aspects of activist engagement. Beyond the distribution of the Kurdish population over four countries, each of which has handed over its contingent of leaders to the PKK, in the case of Turkey, this distribution is coupled with divergent characteristics of participation between urban and rural Kurdish households. The growing Kurdish presence in Turkish and Kurdish towns and cities, intrinsically linked to the repressive policy of the regime in *Bakur*, led us to include individuals who had joined guerrilla operations from urban centres.

2. Results of the analysis

Regarding the effect of gender on political commitment, the differences are articulated in different ways across generations. First, for both women and men, joining the guerrilla movement led to a rupture with their families. Our study revealed several scenes or experiences of the rupture, whose aspect is often (but not always) more dramatic for women, when the respondents announced their decision to join the guerrillas. On the other hand, in traditional societies similar to that of the Kurdish community, a social and family expectation and function is placed on each family member. Men and women participate in the reproduction of the family unit in the broadest sense through generations. The fact that a link can be extracted from the family unit calls this expectation into question, which, beyond the emotional aspects triggered by the separation, explains the problematic nature of the link's extraction to an environment that will cut it off factually and, most often, definitively.

Added to this is the dimension of “family honour” (*namus*), which weighs especially heavily on women in patriarchal societies. The concept of *namus* refers to the sexual integrity in a family. Its primary protection is assigned to men who comply with this duty “through the surveillance of women’s bodies, behaviours, and sexualities”

(Çağlayan 2012). Women are obliged to follow traditional customs and moral values while, on the contrary, men within the family are in charge of protecting *namus* by punishing –most commonly by killing– any woman who acts against the established codes (Sev’er and Yurdakul 2001). Our study of women within the PKK shows that *namus* plays a crucial differentiating role in women’s participation: when a man joins the guerrilla fighters, his decision and actions are never questioned in sexual terms. In the case of women, however, the very same act is considered immoral, staining the family’s *namus*. The reference to *namus* is a barrier to engagement, regardless of the socio-economic level of the family (see infra C2 and C3). Whether the question of *namus* prevents women from joining the PKK or, on the contrary, pushes them further towards the Kurdish liberation movement to seek their individual liberation is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

2.1.C1: Influence of the Turkish left and involvement in the PKK

Until the end of the 1980s, the Kurdish cause had low visibility on the public political scene, particularly in *Bakur*. In this period, the political commitment of families in terms of patriotic sensitivity was appreciated far less than their involvement in classical forms of politics, especially the Turkish left and socialism. We were only able to meet one woman from the C1, making comparison with male trajectories difficult.

Nevertheless, the following statement regarding the negative connotation of *Kurdism*¹² as a political stance is confirmed by almost all first-generation male PKK militants as well as Samira Cansız, who was one of the few women founders of the PKK in the late-1970s.

At that time, we were still distant from the notion of Kurdishness. We were saying, “we are Alevi.” The Kurd did not exist in passports, national identification, books, at work or in official state institutions. Whether you come from Tunceli, Kayseri,

or Thracia, all citizens of the Turkish republic were known as Turks. It was not that important either. Nobody cared about national origin. This discrimination did not exist in the leftist and revolutionary circles of the period! But Ali Gültekin and Kemal Burkay were known as ‘Kurdist’ in Dersim. It was used as profanity: Kurdist! They had many books. They had İsmail Cem’s ‘Eastern Question’ book too. We were Easterners. That’s why it attracted [*people’s*] attention. Nobody else talked about Kurdishness then. (Cansız 2014, Vol.1, 76)

Among first-generation activists, the ideological heritage of family - where it exists - is political (left-wing) rather than patriotic for both men and women. Sensitivity to the Kurdish cause is only slightly exacerbated in urban and rural areas due to the Kemalist policies implemented in Turkey since the beginning of the 20th century. In these families, primary socialisation mechanisms function in an ideological and axiological manner, favourable to a Marxist-Leninist organisation as initially defined in the PKK’s founding manifesto (PKK [1978] 1993). A secondary socialisation process often follows this primary socialisation in highly politicised higher education environments that, in some cases, echo values with which the actors have previously been familiar. These two dimensions are “facilitating factors” for engagement.¹³ Samira, who was born in 1966 in the city of Batman and established her initial contacts with the PKK in 1988, narrates this continuity:

I come from a *Kurdist* and social democrat family tradition. I mean, I grew up in an environment where *Kurdism* was being discussed and talked about a lot. Parallel to this, I grew up in an environment where value judgments of socialism -although it wasn’t exactly socialism, it was a tendency towards socialism- were warmly welcomed and frequently discussed. I had natural familiarity [*with these concepts*]. During my schooling, this developed further as I tended to choose and move around with groups of friends accordingly. In terms of identity in the last grade of high school, I felt closer to Marxist-Leninist revolutionary communist organisations. It came to the forefront concerning my identity in this period. The following period saw the university entrance exam, going to university, and direct contact with the PKK there. (Samira)

These primary socialisation effects are not specific to the Kurds as they were frequently noted in families of French militants from 1968 (Pagis 2014), whether Basque independence fighters (Pérez-Agote 2008) or Corsicans (Crettiez 2016). In *Bakur*, these politicised families are often of random geographic origin and at least relatively progressive regarding gender. Although it is not possible to generalise by basing conclusions on the field data we collected, testimonial evidence (Doğan 1982, 128; Cansız 2014, 314) and relevant PKK publications¹⁴ demonstrate that first-generation women's profiles coincide with Alevi families with higher levels of education. Cinthya, who joined the PKK in the early 1990s, confirms this by defining the general profile of female combatants prior to her generation:

In the 1990s, there was a women's revolution in Kurdistan; thousands of people joined [*the guerrilla movement*]. After that, *Önderlik*¹⁵ made an even deeper analysis of this. There were [*women's initiatives*] before that too. In 1987, YJWK¹⁶ held a congress in Europe and so forth. Until then, participation... Well, maybe my comrades already told you about it. Until that time, the PKK hadn't been socialised that much, you know. I mean, the female comrades who joined before, who were they? Those from Dersim, mostly Alevi sectors, those who had studied, partly from Amed [*Diyarbakır*]. In other words, those who were aware, it was conscious participation, if you like. Half of the female comrades who joined at that time had been teachers before. They were from an educated sector. (Cinthya)

Primary socialisation is seen as one of the motivating factors in combination with a constellation of other *macro-social*, national (violence of state repression¹⁷) and international (national liberation struggles around the world), *meso-social* (propaganda work carried out by the group), and *micro-social* (search for identity in the sense that individuals seek to engage in movements whose collective identity is congruent with their social identity) (Voegtli 2010, 216) factors. Parents do not push their children towards the clandestine organisation; however, there is continuity between the family's

cultural and political tradition and its inclusion in the movements of the Turkish left and then its adherence to the PKK. This continuity appears to be a characteristic of both male and female first generation trajectories. This type of (explicitly left-wing) political heritage is marginally found among individuals from the second and third generations, replaced instead by nationalist and patriotic motives.

2.2.C2: Militant commitment within patriotic Kurdish families

The second cohort (C2) of individuals who joined the PKK during the 1990s no longer came from families with close ties to the Turkish left – or at least only marginally - but from “patriotic” (*yurtsever*) families aware of the Kurdish cause. As confirmed by individuals in this group, the PKK’s 15 August 1984 guerrilla offensive against the Turkish army in Eruh and Shemdinli was a turning point in this respect. For this generation in particular, retrospective narratives help to understand the relationship between history and biography (Andrews 2007) and the revival of Kurdish patriotism in the socio-historical conditions ushered in by this event. In addition to this first difference from C1 (i.e., proximity to the Turkish left vs patriotic sensibility), there was also a variable impact of the latter on women’s and men’s trajectories towards underground militancy. Unlike the urban profile of progressive families, large patriotic Kurdish families have a more traditional background and are primarily located in rural areas of *Bakur*. This sociodemographic difference helps us to understand how the family environment plays a distinct role in the women’s engagement trajectories compared to C1. They are nonetheless invoked as “facilitating factors” for engagement.

At the macro-social level, the context of C2’s engagement is that of a particularly violent civil war in rural *Bakur*, with widespread popular uprisings (*Serhildan*) launched in many towns and cities in the early 1990s. The protests reached

their peak during the *Newroz* celebrations of 21 March 1992, when more than 90 civilians were shot dead by the Turkish security forces across Kurdistan (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 69). Together with strikes and the subsequent unrest, mass demonstrations were held in the frontier towns of Nusaybin and Cizre, gradually spreading to the Kurdish capital of Diyarbakır. The Turkish government responded to these protests with intensive military deployment and frequent incursions into northern Iraq, a safe haven for the PKK guerrilla forces. By the mid-1990, Ankara had approximately 300,000 troops and police deployed in the Kurdish region (McDowall 2004, 439). This policy led to the over-politicisation of Kurdish society.

In this context, the PKK's presence became increasingly visible, especially in rural villages in the Botan region (as confirmed by Cinthya and Sandra), along with the Turkish forces who instituted a system of "village guards" (*korucu*), recruiting some 16,000 armed tribal men by the end of 1989, and doubling that number by 1993 (Kutschera 1994). Faced with this system imposed by the Turkish state, the villagers were forced, both implicitly and explicitly, to choose their side. The presence of guerrillas in the villages had multiple consequences that contributed to polarising the conflict and actors' positions at all levels. First, it led to the population becoming increasingly aware of the Kurdish cause and PKK values. In addition, the party began to play a more active role in social matters, taking over the state's functions through logistical and judicial means to resolve disputes among rural Kurds (Marcus 2007, 177-178). Repression and on-the-ground guerrilla presence acted as "precipitating factors". In this context, which can also be described in terms of a "precipitating factor", there was a massification of commitment to the PKK that affected men and women alike. As the conflict crystallised in the region, the choice to favour a patriotic cause, when discovered by the Turkish army, led to the evacuation and destruction of many villages,

provoking massive forced migration towards Kurdish towns and cities as well as Turkish urban areas.

In terms of interaction in everyday life, the presence of PKK combatants in villages gave rise to two types of experience: On the one hand, proximity to the combatants led to discussions, i.e., ideological inculcation and awareness-raising of the civilian population. It provided a unique opportunity to experience a type of behaviour, adherence to guerrilla values and familiarity with them (i.e., reducing distance and strangeness with the underground armed group). On the other hand, it led to children taking part in a monitoring system designed to signal the arrival of Turkish military troops in search of PKK fighters. Within the context of low-intensity war, there was a “massification” of entry into the PKK, which was a major contextual factor (“facilitating factor”) in the new guerrilla recruitment mechanism. This mechanism mobilised macro-social dimensions, informed by both popular uprisings and the disproportionate repression of the Turkish state; meso-social dimensions with the presence of guerrillas in Kurdish villages and all that this implies; and a micro-social dimensions of family involvement alongside the guerrillas (or their rejection), biographical availability, sensitivity to the cause, and direct or indirect experience of the repression that affected not only Kurdish adults, but also children.

Within these complex mechanisms, the family factor in C2 acquired various forms compared to C1. The macro and micro-social contexts had multiple effects on militant engagement processes. Although, in quantitative terms, there was a tendency towards massive involvement in the PKK, few testimonies in our survey corroborated “trajectories of involvement taking place in blocks, mobilising entire siblings from the same villages and the same associations” (Dorransoro and Grojean 2004). This “massification,” involving handfuls of individuals at local level, had a mimetic effect

and psychological fallout on the actors (“facilitating factor”). The people who remained in the villages were aware that a large percentage of those (often from the immediate environment) who joined the guerrilla forces died. A psychological phenomenon of guilt and a sense of moral responsibility emerged from this context and weighed on the mechanisms where local and micro-social factors combined the “facilitating” and “precipitating” factors of engagement.

Beyond the primary socialisation in rural *Bakur*, another significant factor was observed in urban areas of western Turkey in particular. During the low-intensity war of the 1990s, in which the International Military Education Training (IMET) in Turkey’s war on terror came to the forefront (Jacoby 2010, 106), more than 4000 villages and small hamlets were evacuated and destroyed by the Turkish army, resulting in the displacement of approximately one million people towards towns and cities (Akgür 1997, 67-69). Like Rossano and Vassili in our study, many people who grew up in cities came from families who were forced to migrate as a result of this anti-terror policy. Strong emotional attachment to the region of origin was expressed by recruits who had grown up in western Turkey. Some decisive *transformative* events, such as the PKK’s Eruh-Shemdinli offensive on 15 August 1984, consolidated this sense of identification with Kurdistan, encouraging young Kurds subjected to state violence to “return to the country” in order to liberate it (“precipitating factors”). On these occasions, *facilitating factors*, such as primary socialisation and *precipitating factors* (i.e., specific triggers for action) combined to lead to clandestine engagement (Crenshaw 1981; Della Porta 1995, 166-170). Vassili explained his involvement in the PKK by underscoring the multi-dimensional nature of the engagement mechanisms and the role played by the family:

How did I join? There was plenty of involvement [*in the PKK*] from my neighbourhood; many people joined and, on this basis, we were well informed

about the comrades. Although we weren't in Kurdistan, we got information from them. After the breakthrough of 15 August and the armed struggle... We are from Eruh, you know, we are registered in Eruh. After the breakthrough of 15 August, a voice of patriotism developed among us, although we lived in an urban area. In this regard, we saw comrades coming and working here. We decided on this basis, and we joined. In fact, our whole family was patriotic, and engagement was possible because of this. (Vassili)

Family patriotism combined with the macro-social factor of Kurdish unrest against the Turkish state, the meso-social factor of the growing clandestine struggle, which led to targeted attacks and a hitherto unequalled force of attraction in the Kurdish population, and the micro-social factor of personal identification with Kurdish patriotism and a yearning for national liberation. In this context, the conditions of political violence not only existed, but were also formed in action through the long-running course of the conflict. This observation correlates with Della Porta's view of violence as an emerging phenomenon in which action reproduces the conditions for its development (Della Porta 2014, 182).

If the immediate environment, in the broader sense of family, village, region, contributes to the incentive for clandestine engagement ("facilitating factors"), it is often the case that the family unit acts as a curb, especially for women. Although most female leaders we met in C2 came from families with a patriotic background, the family structure acted more as a hindrance for C2 women than as a facilitating factor for their involvement. Among all 15 female guerrillas we met in this group, this was most explicitly noted in the case of Cinthya's mother and Sandra's father, who developed strategies to keep their daughters within the family's traditional patriarchal structure. Endogamy at an early age, a widespread phenomenon in some regions of rural Kurdistan and Turkey, is at the forefront of methods adopted to prevent young girls from joining the PKK, as Cinthya recalls from her own experience in rural Botan:

My maternal uncle and others were saying all the time, “give this girl to us.” I mean, there were many candidates for marriage. My mother would always say, “no, no, no!” But as my mother realised that I would join the PKK... I’d fallen in love with the PKK, everyone knew that; I’d given up everything! You know, normally young girls prepare their *çeyiz* [dowry] to prepare to get married and so forth. My only agenda was about the PKK. I didn’t think of anything but the PKK! It was like that, really. So, my mother saw this, and her negative attitude [*towards marriage*] became softer. She thought that “if I make her marry someone, maybe she won’t join the PKK.” I heard that, and one day I had a row with my mother. I’d already had a row with my mother, and it was also because of the PKK; she didn’t allow me to go and see the comrades. When comrades came over to my uncle’s house, she’d say, “you don’t go there!” She thought “if she goes there, she’ll be influenced and join,” that was her main concern! There were Newroz celebrations, and she didn’t let me go. I got very angry with everyone. (Cinthya)

Both individuals circumvented these strategies by joining the guerrillas at an early age (16 and 17, respectively). Although it is not exclusively women who have to deal with this strategy (as Simon confirmed in C1), in comparison with men, they are far more vulnerable to social pressure from their community.

2.3.C3: Continuity of patriotic family influence

Those who joined the PKK guerrilla forces after Öcalan’s arrest form the last cohort in our study (C3). Among them, women are over-represented, with 9 individuals out of 16 in total. As other recent studies on Kurdish struggle suggest (Weiss 2020, 381), their testimonies show that the vast majority come from families sympathetic to the party. For the older ones, we find mechanisms of commitment and influencing factors comparable to those of the previous cohort (C2), which include repression, the constant presence of guerrillas in villages, the impact of ‘martyrs’, over-politicisation as a result of uprisings in *Bakur*, references to 15 August 1984, and emotional attachment to the Kurdish village of their childhood.

Established as an influential political force since the 1990s, the self-proclaimed Kurdish National Liberation Movement has gradually left its mark on the public sphere, enjoying broad support among the Kurdish population in the early 2000s. Electoral results obtained by legal Kurdish political parties since the early 1990s –despite frequent bans through Turkish legal interventions- clearly illustrate the increasing social legitimacy the group enjoys (Yeğen, Tol, and Çalışkan 2016, 50-58). This political capital makes support for political identity and activism evident, comparable to that of some C1 families in favour of the Turkish left. Despite their diverse nature, we can see that families’ political inspiration on recruits is comparable in C1 and C3. Our study also notes an ongoing demonstration of “patriotic sensitivity” and politicisation of families, clearly observed among C2 families as well as individuals in C3. In a significant number of cases (Lilas, Daniel, Coline, Thierry, Idra, Betty), continuity between family activism and the political commitment of activists comparable to that seen in C1 has thus emerged (“facilitating factors”). Children’s political engagement reflects a continuation of the patriotic family engagement tradition, affecting women and men in similar ways. This tradition, which had socialist roots among the families in C1, takes a clearly “patriotic” form in C3.

However, especially for women, there is no analytical link between “patriotic family” and approval of militancy by family members, in other words, parents (Béatrice, Idra). Qualitative data analysis shows that men are not immune to this reluctance either (Daniel, Thierry). Thierry, whose father was a paradigmatic figure of political commitment and a role model for his son, highlights his father’s negative reaction to his choice of further involvement in Kurdish activism. His testimony also reflects a general tendency among patriotic Kurdish families regarding their children’s involvement in the Kurdish struggle:

How did your family react to your joining the PKK?

It was all of a sudden thing for my family, indeed! [*laughing*] But I can say this: If I'm here today, *my father is the strongest factor for this to happen*. My family had difficulty accepting this at the beginning. They knew, I mean, they knew that I was involved in activities, in certain practices, but they showed an utterly protectionist attitude towards me. [...] I mean, the thing is "I do it, and it's enough for all of us! Let me do it; let me go, but let my children stay away!" In fact, there's a saying in *Bakur*: "Hit guerrilla hit, found Kurdistan, [*but*] stay away from my child!"¹⁸ There's that issue. My family is patriotic. In fact, one of the things that most influenced me, since my childhood, is that whenever we got news about a martyr, our house converted into a house of mourning. Especially my father, he has such a strong attachment. His emotional attachment is so profound. In fact, my father is aware of his attachment too up to a certain point. But *when it comes to himself, his family, his children, sure, it's difficult for them to accept this*. To accept this, you must have awareness. As they couldn't do it at the beginning, it was difficult, but now they accept it. They have no other choice anyway. (Thierry)

Few activists of any generation conferred a major direct role in their trajectory to the political or patriotic heritage of their family. Instead, they tended to be involved in decisive macro-social events, such as the repressive state measures, or meso-social events such as the 15 August 1984 offensive, or the arrest of Öcalan in 1999 (i.e., some "precipitating factors"). When the family environment, combining primary socialisation and a remarkable event (involvement of a family member and their possible 'martyrdom'), appears to have played a role in the trajectories, it is rare for it to be experienced as 'decisive' in the same way as other major events, like the capture of Öcalan, for example (especially for those in C3 who call themselves "Önderlik participants"). The impact of family members joining the guerrillas tends to be emotional rather than ideological due to the repression that falls either on the person involved in the struggle or, subsequently, on their family. When asked about the events that marked her militant trajectory, Victoria's list helps to place the family factor back in the mechanisms of engagement:

One of the reasons is my uncle, who joined the guerrilla forces. A transformation took place afterwards, both as a family and as an individual. Before that, we had a family and community reality with no contradiction, since the region where I lived was on the Turkish border. It was a bit disconnected from the inner areas of Kurdistan. The enemy had a slightly different approach in this region. In the more assimilated regions, there aren't so many [*national*] contradictions. When my uncle joined the guerrilla ranks, we could say that the family's whole mindset changed, a complete change of perspective. Firstly, my uncle's commitment, and secondly, as I always say, the state's oppression on the family. I witnessed this at a very young age, and it left its mark on me. Third, my commitment to the PKK. These have always been pivotal moments for me. (Victoria)

As in the case of Victoria, who joined the party in 2004 at the age of 22, the participation of a family member in the PKK played a *transformative* role that affected the entire family. However, as most individuals point out, it is still the combination of macro (state repression) and micro (involvement) factors that forge the specific mechanism of clandestine involvement. The impact of the family environment drenches individuals in experiences, producing often emotional reactions in the recruits rather than triggering a process of identity appropriation or ideological inculcation.

3. Does being a patriot (necessarily) imply offering a child to the guerrilla movement?

Across the generations, the impact of family adherence to political values or patriotic sensibilities on the trajectories of descendants is modulated in a more nuanced way than the literature has so far suggested. A patriotic family sensibility does not facilitate a child's departure to the guerrilla organisation as such. The incentive is exercised through more complex mechanisms of socialisation that individuals go through. In particular, family patriotism rarely offsets the impact of patriarchy on women's engagement trajectory, except in the first generation. Beyond the heavy socio-

demographic variables influencing engagement trajectories and highlighted by the sociological literature (Dorransoro and Grojean 2009; Guibet Lafaye 2023), we would like to outline several social mechanisms that have often gone unnoticed in studies carried out to date.

As observed earlier in the attitude of Thierry's father, in most cases, patriotic Kurdish families show total disapproval of their children's active involvement in the Kurdish movement. When a family member joins despite the family's objection, however, it attracts and encourages other potential young members. Nadim, who is from a village in rural Garzan, narrates his family's disapproval and the subsequent participation of his peer relatives in the guerrilla movement after his departure:

Many Kurdish families don't approve of their children joining [*the PKK*]. They're Kurdish patriots, they're aware of the cause, they want the liberation and so forth, but they say, "let it happen, but in another way!" For example, we were doing many things without the knowledge of our families. [...] I was the first one who joined [*the PKK*] from the village, which wasn't a very big one; a village with some 20-30 houses in the Garzan region. But then, others joined. Sure, my participation inevitably influenced others. Later on, three of my cousins joined as well. One of them fell a martyr in Garzan, others are still alive. Also, from my maternal uncle's side, there are many members. In other words, it influenced my family. (Nadim)

Qualitative data analysis has even revealed cases that are contradictory to the family tradition approach. When a younger member of a family joins the PKK (and faces the consequences, usually death, prison or exile), elders who had not previously been involved in Kurdish politics begin to get involved to a certain degree. This illustrates that the "family tradition" follows an "intergenerational" process rather than a "transgenerational" flow. Politicisation, in this case, is not from the ascendants to the descendants but vice versa, to which the academic literature has so far made little

reference. William's case exemplifies this situation of a generational break-up from the non-patriotic family tradition. Having joined the guerrilla forces in 1993 at the age of 15 following his sister's participation, William says that after he and his elder sister left for the guerrilla group, and the subsequent death of his sister there, his immediate family members, who once had strict ties with the Turkish political Islamic party, gradually began to adopt a position closer to the PKK.

[*My family*] had generally followed something closer to the dominant state policy. There are still some people like that in the family, but after our departure [*to the guerrillas*], some friends, some relatives, and other people also joined. With our participation, the thing was also broken. Today, for example, a family environment closer to the PKK ideology has emerged; more than half of my family are like that today, although others still support the AKP. (William)

Complementary to primary socialisation within a patriotic family and the social environment in which the family is embedded, a family guardian figure with whom the actors identify appears to be a decisive element in these trajectories towards the underground movement. Several narratives highlight the role of an iconic family figure acting as a "role model" (Victoria, Olga).¹⁹ The role of this family reference should not be interpreted in Weberian terms of charismatic authority (Hoffman Dawson 2014, 350), however. Rather, it is crucial to understand how it fits into the processes of identity construction, in this case, the "hierarchy of salience" in structuring different personal identities (Serpe and Stryker 2011, 335).

Nevertheless, this figure's role in retrospective narratives should not allow us to underestimate the correlative effect of repression (macro-social factor) induced by the involvement on family members or, more widely, on the villagers. Indeed, as many individuals point out, when the security forces identify an individual's participation in guerrilla warfare, the activist's entire family is subjected to direct physical repression.

From then on, the context of popular uprisings of the 1990s and the strengthening of the PKK, together with the involvement of a close relative, becomes a reason for the actor to perceive the situation as an opportunity for the salient identity, embodied by the ‘patriot’ engaged in the ranks of the party, to emerge. A role performance consistent with the role expectations associated with that identity then tends to emerge.

Qualitative data collected over three consecutive generations reveal that prisons constitute highly functional socialisation mechanisms, not only for inmates who serve long prison terms, but also for the family members who visit them. Prison visits are a key experience (*decisive event*) in raising awareness of the realities of repression. They can be an occasion for vexation and humiliation that mark the child or young adult irreversibly, consolidating the state’s image as an ‘enemy’ within family circles. The commitment of a relative or the expression of patriotic ambitions and demands through political mechanisms often leads to imprisonment under Turkey’s strict penal code. Since the founding generation, as Öcalan himself affirms in his own case (Öcalan 1995, 39-40), detention and short-term imprisonment during political activities leads individuals to an incubation period in which inmates are subjected to varying degrees of physical violence. Lilac, whose first attempt to join the PKK at the age of 13 after witnessing her uncle’s killing failed as the PKK commanders turned her down, explains how her later arrest and imprisonment experience consolidated her decision:

I hadn’t yet turned 18 when I was sent to prison. Then this reality emerged inside me: when I wanted to join the PKK, they told me, “you’re too young”, but I was tortured when I was 17 years old. While the Turkish state says it defends freedom, human rights, children’s rights, although we did nothing, we were sent to prison and were tortured just because we were Kurds. After that period, my road map was clearer. I saw that, whatever happened, the only solution or the only way out for me would be the mountains. I decided during that period, and I joined the guerrilla movement in 2005. (Lilas)

Contrary to what has often been asserted, the qualitative data collected does not show that Kurdish families “give a child” to the PKK. Instead, the field study highlights family strategies to prevent children from joining the guerrilla forces. While, in the context of this patriarchal society, the involvement of young men is more acceptable to families than that of women, we observe that in both cases, families (especially parents) adopt a more ‘protectionist’ position regarding their children’s militancy in the Kurdish movement. Both the negative attitudes of Thierry’s father and Daniel’s parents towards their initial involvement in Kurdish activism offer clear examples. Patriotic families know only too well about the “consequences of militancy (death, prison, exile)” and thus try to prevent their children from any kind of involvement by adopting certain strategies. These include arranged marriage at an early age (Cinthya, Redwan), putting pressure on them (Karim), or even sending them abroad (Alexia). The level of the families’ patriotism does not appear to make a difference in this respect. Although in some cases they voluntarily help the guerrillas (in the villages in particular), when it comes to “giving them a child”, their attitude is significantly different. Unlike observations noted among *mujahid* families (Bouhana and Wikström, 2011, 28; Asal, Fair, and Shellman 2008), Kurdish families tend to adopt a more protective attitude.

When faced with these strategies, women’s room for manoeuvre is far more limited as the family intervention, marked by patriarchy, occurs at a very young age (adolescent girls for the C2). For men, on the other hand, the measures are softer, more flexible, and primarily take the form of attractive career opportunities or moral pressure (see Simon, Thierry, Daniel). Among all the male participants, we only had one testimony of such a family strategy in C1 (Simon), while it was frequently mentioned for women in C2 and C3. Moral pressure is extremely strong on women due to *namus* issues from which men are entirely exempt. Öcalan’s harsh criticism of the social

structure and gender issue in Kurdistan, with its clear emphasis on family and women (1993), apart from the early 1990s, make the PKK one of the few attractive options available to young women who reject such social pressure (Marcus 2007, 174; Grojean 2019, 149). Myrtille, who was 13 years old when she joined the guerrillas, explains the pressure exerted on women in the society in which she grew up:

In our society, as a girl, either you marry when you are 15, or you don't have any other option. The community that we left is feudal; a girl going to the mountains is considered an affair of honour [*namus*]. How can a girl go to the mountains? How can a girl fight? It wasn't seen as an act of dignity at the time because the community was ignorant. In 1992, the PKK was still connecting to society; therefore, it wasn't seen as point of pride, "our daughters are going to the mountains"; it was seen as a matter of honour. Actually, it was a decision against that mindset. I mean, you rejected the life that was killing you, that was driving you to suicide; you chose freedom. (Myrtille)

Finally, commitment means a conscious and assumed break-up from the family (affirmed by Samira in C1, Cinthya and Sandra in C2, Béatrice in C3). It is not simply a *factual* break-up imposed by the guerrilla movement on its members, as is often noted in the literature, but is also a moral one, especially for women as it breaks the social covenant formed around them inherited from existing patriarchal structures. In this sense, joining the PKK means the obligatory rejection of a past life to establish a new one. Samira stresses the importance of this cleavage that women have to go through by "burning the bridges," as she metaphorically describes it:

You join [*the PKK*] by burning your bridges; you have to reject your old lifestyle, your old friends, your ex-boyfriends, your loves, your mother and father, every kind of thing you had. [...] Because of this, there was a slogan in the PKK: "Did you burn the bridges?" And yes, we did; I burnt them too. For this reason, my past was one life. My second life was the time I spent in the PKK and in the mountains, in the military field. (Samira)

All of the above-mentioned gender-oriented variables make women's trajectories towards politico-military involvement different from men's. Family members adopt many protectionist approaches to prevent their children from facing the harsh consequences of militancy and to protect the family's honour. While the situation implies greater obstacle for women's involvement, it also constitutes another important motivation, offering both personal and national liberation.

Conclusions

In studies on clandestine struggles, the role of the family and primary socialisation is often cloaked in predispositions, with little proof in empirical terms. Its diverse impact on women's and men's trajectories of entry into political violence within traditional and patriarchal societies has often been overlooked, obstructing precise analysis in this respect. Thus, it may well be argued that primary socialisation mechanisms have more to do with *facilitating* factors rather than *precipitating* ones. However, their impact needs to be nuanced, depending on gender. In the PKK case, contrary to what has often been suggested, the patriotic sensitivity of families, or even their adherence to the cause, does not prevent them from introducing obstacles to block their children's clandestine membership. It only intervenes as a *facilitating* factor in terms of primary socialisation in a specific environment, but always in conjunction with macro and meso-social factors that facilitate individuals' involvement in the guerrilla movement.

For the older generations (C1), this specific environment, characterised by proximity to the Turkish left, potentially gives rise to both male and female clandestine commitment. A significant part of the continuity of this primary socialisation, however, is mediated by secondary socialisation mechanisms, the first being the urban university environment, which leads to militancy engagement. This continuity is also observed in

the younger generation that joined the PKK in the early 2000s (C3). The revolutionary context of the primary socialisation environment makes younger family members more open to the avant-garde organisation of the Kurdish national liberation struggle that arose from Turkish revolutionary leftism (Jongerden and Akkaya 2009).

For the generation engaged in the 1990s (C2) marked by popular uprisings and low-intensity war, primary socialisation is rarely characterised by parents' political commitment. Considering the historical and geographical context of commitment, we need to rethink the configuration of primary socialisation in the light of the urbanised and progressive family environments of C1. A patriotic sensibility rather than formal commitment to a political structure is observed among the majority of recruits from rural areas. Although this patriotic mindset can take the form of practical support for the guerrillas, the impact of the family factor tends to dissolve in the multiplicity of elements involved in primary socialisation (context of revolts and repression in *Bakur*, or even on the family, adherence to guerrilla warfare of people in the village or the surrounding environment). The influence of the family environment thus acts more like a blanket experience, often producing emotional reactions in the recruits rather than a process of ideological indoctrination, identity appropriation, or political inculcation. More than a continuity, clandestine recruitment prompts a break-up with the family structure and the social domain in which the individuals previously socialised. This "biographical bifurcation" (Tarragoni 2012) occurs in the form of a rupture, which is even more significant and radical when the recruit is a woman. Indeed, in both C2 and C3, families' patriotic sensitivity in no way means that family members approve of their children's involvement in the PKK, and this includes men.

Across generations, the impact of family adherence to political values or patriotic sensibilities on descendants' trajectories are thus modulated in a more nuanced

way than the secondary literature has so far suggested. Moreover, these impacts vary by gender. As clearly observed among the individuals in C2 and C3, a family's political proximity to the left or their patriotic values in no way guarantee obvious and acquired support for illegal engagement, be it female or male. On the contrary, families' reluctance to see their children join the guerrilla movement is expressed in the adoption of strategies to prevent this act of departure. Their degree of coercion is much greater when exercised against young women due to the male-dominant cultural codes in Kurdistan. Thus, patriotic family sensitivity does not, as such, facilitate the departure of a child who decides to join the guerrillas. The family factor is just one aspect of more complex mechanisms that combine macro, meso and micro social dimensions and play a distinct role, depending on whether the potential recruit is a man or a woman.

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Table 1. Sociodemographic data of participants

Available upon request

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³ *Women Vs. ISIS* directed by Anastasia Trofimova (Russia: RT Documentary, 2015), DVD

⁴ Tom Perry, “Exclusive: Syrian Kurdish YPG aims to expand force to over 100,000” *Reuters*, March 20, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-ypg-exclusive-idUSKBN16R1QS>

⁵ Although belonging to the Western world, the patriarchal factor also distinctly modulates the violent political engagement of women and men in clandestine combat (Hamilton 2003; Felices-Luna 2012; Guibet Lafaye 2020).

⁶ On a much smaller scale and in a distinct geographical area, Da Silva (2017) attempted to cross-reference the paths and narratives of a woman and a man who engaged in politically violent activism in Portugal at a younger age and in different periods of time .

⁷ The field research of this study was conducted by the *Authors*.

⁸ This method consists of asking each new interviewee to put the interviewer in contact with one or more people he or she knows who match the criteria for the survey.

⁹ For digital archive of both publications, please visit “*Arşiv*,” Serxwebûn, PKK, last modified January 2021, accessed March 1, 2021, <http://serxwebun.org/>

¹⁰ Other questions were asked about the context of engagement and the “decisive events” that may have marked the interviewees. The list of questions is available on request.

¹¹ In C1, N = 9 with only 1 female interviewed.

¹² In Turkish *Kürtçülük*. Kurdism refers to a political stance defending the protection and development of Kurdish identity (Kurdishness) through political means.

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- ¹³ On this point, see Crenshaw, 1981; Della Porta, 1995, p. 166-170 and *infra* 2.2.
- ¹⁴ Please *see* PKK, 1976 – 1984 *PKK Direniş Şehitleri Albümü* [Album of resistance martyrs, 1976-1984] (n.p., n.d.), 175, 187, 229, 230-231, 261-289.
- ¹⁵ *Önderlik* literally means “leadership” in Turkish. The term is used among the PKK commanders and patriotic circles when referring to Abdullah Öcalan. They also adopt similar terms such as *Başkan* (Tr. President) or *Rêber* (Guide) and *Serok* (Leader) in Kurdish Kurmanji.
- ¹⁶ *Yekîtiya Jinên Williamparêzên Kurdistan* (Union of Kurdistan’s Patriotic Women).
- ¹⁷ Which, for their part, act more as “precipitating factors” for clandestine engagement.
- ¹⁸ Original version in Turkish “Vur gerilla vur, Kürdistan’ı kur, çocuğumdan uzak dur!”
- ¹⁹ On the role of the family narrative environment in engagement trajectories, see Da Silva 2017; Ochs & Capps 1996, 30; Somers 1994, 39; Frank 2010, 41.
- ²⁰ <http://www.metabasis.it/index.php?lang=fr>; DOI: 10.7413/18281567244.